

Fire Damage: Calgary, AB

In one of the city's oldest neighborhoods, where modest dwellings from a time of cowboys were being replaced with condos for the uber-rich, I found this abandoned house, partly burnt, its windows boarded but the front door slightly ajar. With some effort (the door no longer moved on its hinges), I managed to squeeze inside.

I spent hours in the house, photographing the devastation of a house fire for the first time. In the living room, the heat had blistered layers of wallpaper, revealing a charred decorating history down to the slat walls and their newspaper insulation. Plastic lampshades had become dripping, abstract sculptures; a couch, an explosion of singed fiber like uncombed hair.

I photographed this peeled wallpaper under light from the split walls, composing a frame that showed the reluctant shift from life to death, to severance, to an unexpected beauty. I had to stand very still on the weak floor to avoid shaking my tripod during the long exposure.

I returned less than a week later to photograph the old house again. I was too late: the only clue that it had existed at all were two charred boards and an outline of the cinder-block foundation.

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